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Box 09, Folder 06 - "Living Grammar or 'Brighter Grammar for Beginners'" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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LIVING GRAMMAR .

or

"Brighter Grammar for Beginners "

Being suggestions for use in the teaching of the
Elements of Grammar to young children -ages 7-8 ,or there-
abouts .

Contents will include the teaching of :-

Nouns and Verbs .

Adjectives ,

Prepositions .

Pronouns .

Adverbs .

Conjunctions .

"Mongrel "Words .

 Conjunctive Adverbs .

 Gerunds and Participles .

Analysis of Sentences .

Direct and Indirect Speech .

Punctuation .

General Hints .

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General Hints .

Finally , by way of a little diversion at the end , you can play a little adjective game , which brings home the same idea . (i.e. if the class is fairly small , and you have enough room)

Two or three of the children can come out and be Nouns : e.g. one stands for a house , another a tree , another river . Then other children can come out and be suitable adjectives : e.g. a large, old house ; a tall, green tree etc. They can choose the adjectives themselves . Each adjective must stand arm in arm with the noun it qualifies . If you tell the nouns to sit down , the adjectives - being left as it were "In vacuo " must fly to their places unless they can find any nouns still standing to which they can legitimately attach themselves .

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LIVING GRAMMAR .

or

(Grammar "Alive , Alive -O!")

The important principle to follow in teaching the elements of Grammar to small children is that they should be made to, live it . That is to say , as far as possible the experience should come before the definition. Definition should be the consummation of an active process .

To make this clear we will - following the same principle - plunge at once into a concrete example , and the principle will at once become evident .

Suppose we are dealing with the Parts of Speech . Say Nouns and Verbs . It is better in this case to take them both together , to get the value of the contrast . Most Grammar books begin with a dogmatic statement that a "Noun is the name of a person or thing " ; "A Verb is a word which expresses being or doing " ,but the following is a more excellent way .

First of all you cut up some blank paper or cardboard (blank post cards are very useful) - about twice as many as you have children in the class - and divide them into two piles . On each of the slips in one pile you write the name of some object in the room - chair , desk , chalk ,

floor , book , etc, taking care that they are objects within the child's reach . On each of the slips in the other pile you write the a verb , taking care that each represents an action such as the child can easily accomplish, as :- hop, jump , walk , sit , smile , bend , write , etc. .

This done , you give each of the children one of these slips , telling them not to let the others see what word they have got (this is an excitement in itself !) In distributing the slips you must see that about an equal number of verbs and nouns are given out , though not in regular alternation .

Then you go back to your place, and the fun begins . "Now " , you say , " each of you has a slip of paper with a special word written on it . They all look alike , but as a matter of fact there are two quite different groups of words. Each , in fact belongs to one or the other of two different families , or as we say Parts of Speech . An we' ve got to find out what these groups are , what each of them is like , and to which family your particular card belongs .

"I shall call you each out separately , and you must come up to me and show me your card , and then you must do what you think best with it - either put it on the thing it describes or act it , and the others must guess what the word is . Now Jack you come up first "

Thereupon Jack comes up , greatly excited , as are the others , and shows you his card which he has kept care-
fully hidden . It has the word "chair " on it . So with

great solemnity he goes and places it on a chair .

¶ "Now what's the word ?" , and there is a chorus of "Chair"
Jack sits down , and Jimmy comes up , with , let us say, the
word "Book" , which he places on a book , and the word is
guessed .

Next comes Patrick , on whose slip is written the word
"run". He shows it to you and you say "Alright , go ahead "
He stands puzzled , having probalby forgotten what you said
about acting the word as well as naming an object .

"Hurry up ,Pat , get a move on " But he stands irresolute .
"I can't put it on " . "Why?ot , isn't it in the room ?"
you say , pulling his leg a bit . "Well , what did I say ,
have you forgotten ? if you can't put it on anything can
you do it ?" A light begins to dawn . He looks up
enquiringly , like a dog waiting for its master's word . It
seems scarcely credible - to run in the school-room .

Meanwhile the class have been getting more and more
curious . "Alright , Pat , go on , don't be afraid "
Then off he goes - running - with great delight . "Well "
- to the class - "What's the word " . "Run " they all
answer excitedly , begging for their turn .

So Pat sits down well satisfied , and so it goes on
through the class . (If it is a very large class, ~~up~~ 60 or
more one would have to be content with a selction) Each
child shows his pare to you (this is so that you can see
that he does it all right) acts the word , if it is a verb
or places it down on the object it signifies if it is a

If it is a small class , and you have plenty of time , you can give out another set of cards , seeing that those who got naming words get doing verbs and vica versa . Also , if you like you can make the "verbs " go and stand on one side of the room , when they have done their action , and the "nouns" stand together on the other , which ^{visibly} enhances emphasises the idea of a classification .

He will be a very dull child , if - by the time they have all had one or two turns - certain distinctions have not arisen spontaneously in his mind, viz:-

- 1) There are two classes of words .
- 2) One class makes you put a name on a thing .
- 3) The other class makes you do something .

All you have to do, now , is to gather up their experience into a definite form , by teaching them that the words which make you name things are Nouns , and the doing words are Verbs .@ For the moment you need not bother about Abstract Nouns or Verbs of Being) .

Perhaps that is all you will get done in one lesson. Next lesson you can repeat it for revision - only taking one or two examples , so as not to waste too much time . Or you can get the children to come out and act a verb out of their own head , and touch a Noun (stricly speaking of course the object named) .

And now you can teach them to learn by heart an exact definition .

Next you can write on the board a series of simple sentences , and get the children to pick out and write down the Nouns and the Verbs in two separate columns , the sort of exercise you will find in any elementary Grammar text-book .

Or another very useful way of doing it is to get them to copy down the sentences - very neatly - and underline the nouns in blue and the verbs in red (or any other colours) . If you haven't got crayons it is well worth getting them , for they are very useful in distinguishing parts of speech from eachother .

It is not advisable , however , to always keep one colour to one part of speech as Dr. Montessori does in her Grammar Boxes . For in this ~~child-~~ case the child is apt to rely on the colour to distinguish the part of speech e.g. it must be a verb because it is on a red slip of paper , or a noun because it is on a black paper . Not the colour but the function of the word is the thing to keep in mind all along .

ADJECTIVES .

Many Grammar books start off with a definition of an Adjective as something which tells you what kind of a Noun it is . Which is quite right and useful enough in its way , but it is better to get the children used to the more comprehensive meaning that an adjective is used with a noun to limit its application.

You will , in fact , find teachers who do not realise the function of an adjective looked at in this way . Yet it is really quite simple . Suppose the big circle to represent all the objects that come under the name "flower". Now some flowers are yellow ; therefore the adjective yellow limits the application of the word flower , as can be shown diagrammatically as in Fig. 2.. Similarly other colours can limit the application of the word flower (Fig.3) . Again flowers can be ~~gi~~ big or little : these again limit the application of the noun .

Some flowers are big ,yellow flowers , a further limitation ,which can be shown by the intersection of the two circles ,by the part common to both .(Fig. 4) . This is an important principle to realise , for it includes not only adjectives of quality (which tell you what kind) but also Numeral , Demonstrative , and Possessive adjectives ,and so on.

These diagrams , though useful for the child at a later stage are not the best way to teach the function of an

I want - just small "I'm afraid you're no good , Jerry !
Someone else have a try " .

"Now Peter , what's your word ? " "Blue " .

"Blue"

"Very good . Now Peter bring me blue " .

He will hunt round and probably bring a blue book or a blue
pencil ' and you treat him as you did Jerry .

"Any body else try ?"

Nothing daunted Michael comes up , smiling , but on his
guard . "What's your word ? "

"Three "

"Good ! Now surely you can do it . Bring me three "

Jinx Michael is cautious "Three what? " he asks .

"Ah but you're asking too much ...

"Well " , says Michael , "Youre not asking enough . It
must be three something ! "

And so the cat comes out of the bag . Adjectives are
like very small children : they never go out alone - they
always have to go with a noun (or pronoun - but you needn't
bring that in at this stage) .

So now come the business of getting the adjectives
attached to suitable nouns . Each child comes out in turn and
puts its adjective beside anaeun- object in the room which
it qualifies : the red book ; my pencil ; two rulers . It
is best to place the adjective next to the object it qualifies
not on it - that place being reserved for the noun itself

one short . But if you say " Bring me the short , red ,
chalk " , there is a further limitation amongst the red
chalk . Or you can say - using the draughtsman "Bring me
six ,black counters " .."or three,white counterscounters "

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Adjectives Dependent on Nouns .

Adjectives , by their very nature , cannot exist by
themselves .(If you try to make them they turn into abstract
nouns !) It is important that the child should realise from
the first the dependent nature of an adjective , for an
unattached adjective is a grammatical abstraction as unnatur-
al as tail without a gad dog .

The following are a few suggestions as to how to
bring this fact home to the children . First you prepare a
number of slips on each of which is written an adjective
qualifying something in the room eg. red , two , small ,
large , smooth , etc. ; and you give one out to each child .

"Now Jerry , what's yours ? , " "Small, Sir "

"Well , stand out Jerry " - he stands out -"Now , Jerry
I want you to bring me"small " Jerry hesitates for a bit , so
you encourage him "Come on , Jerry , I'm not asking for much
-bring me small ;come on , don't be stingy " Not going to
be beaten , he will probablny go and get a small piece of
chalk and bring it . You turn away in scorn "That's a small
bit of chalk ; I want - just small " . Perhaps he will bring

has nothing on it . The child will smile to himself and bring all the pencils ; and when they have guessed you can point out that when there is no adjective the noun has a wider significance .

Similarly other exercises can be given by the teacher to show different kinds of adjectives . One can have a collection of objects of different shapes - square , circular , triangular and so on ; or light and heavy ; always bringing home the fact that the adjective limits the application of a noun .

Definite and Indefinite Numeral adjectives can be shown very effectively in the same way . You can have a board with a number of "draughtsmen " on it and say first : "Bring me the draughtsmen on that board " , and the child will bring the lot . Then you say "Bring me three draughtsmen" and so on . Or arrange them in order and say "Bring me the fifth draughtsman " .

Demonstrative and Possessive adjectives can be illustrated in the same way .

Several Adjectives to One Noun

The more adjectives applied to the noun the greater the limitation . This you can show quite easily , something after the following manner . As in the first exercise you can have a tray with pieces of chalk of different colours on it - red , blue , yellow , etc . , but you can now have long and short bits of each colour . "If you say , Now bring me the

keeps the secret a little longer .Some children are amazingly slow in the "up-take " , and it gives them a chance of finding the thing out for themselves on the second or third chance opportunity .)

"Now Pat you can sit down,Who'll come next ?"
There will be a forest of hands .Selecting one , you repeat the ceremony with another slip , and a different piece of chalk is selected , and the word on the next slip is guessed and written down (or said aloud if you are not having any writing)

When you have finished all the slips , and discovered what was on them , it is easy to elicit the information from the class that the words on the slips tell you what kind of chalk is wanted . Not just chalk - but the red chalk or the blue chalk and so on . It is easy to point out how these words have a limiting effect . If you say just the chalk , it means all the chalk ; but the slips limit the range of the word chalk .

In a similar way you can place some pencils or rods on a tray - some long and some short . When the child comes up you can say :-"bring me the .." - then either give it a slip with the word short on it , or whisper so that the others do not hear -"short pencils " . Then the same with the long pencils .

Then to vary it , you can ask a child up and say Bring me thepencils " ; and give it a slip which

A better way is as follows . Take several pieces of coloured chalk - say red, green , brown , blue and white - and place them on a small tray , and place the tray on a desk or small table where all the children can see . Then stand at some little distance away from it , and ask for a volunteer . Jimmy stands out .

"Now , Jimmy ", you say , " I should be much obliged if you would bring me the chalk on that table . The chances are that he will bring the whole tray , or all the pieces in his hands . If he only brings you one piece you can say , "I did not say some of the chalk on that tray - I said the chalk "- in which case he will at once rectify his mistake .

Jimmy sits down now and you get another . "Now Pat I want you to fetch chalk for me too , but not just as Jimmy did . I shall give you a slip of paper with one word written on it which will help you to bring me what I want . The others must watch carefully and guess what is on the paper "

The you hand him a slip of paper with the word red on it . "Now , look at the paper and go and fetch me the chalk from the table ". Pat reads the word and goes off to the table , glances over the chalk lying on it , and selects the red chalk , leaving the rest . I hold up the chalk in case every one has not seen . "Well, what was the word written on the paper - No , don't shout it out - write it down " (It is a good plan sometimes to do this - as it